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(54) Apparatus for treating mixtures of liquid and gas.

(57) Apparatus for treating mixtures of liquid and gas comprising a tubular wall (2) defining an inner space (3) and an outer space (6). Swirl imparting means (11) are provided for imparting a rotary movement to a gas/liquid mixture supplied into said inner space to separate the liquid and the gas. In the tubular wall at least one opening (12) is arranged for discharging the separated liquid. A primary gas outlet tube (13) having the lower end (14) thereof positioned inside the inner space (3) is provided for discharging the separated gas stream from the inner space. The apparatus further comprises a secondary gas outlet tube (16) for discharging gas from the outer space (6).

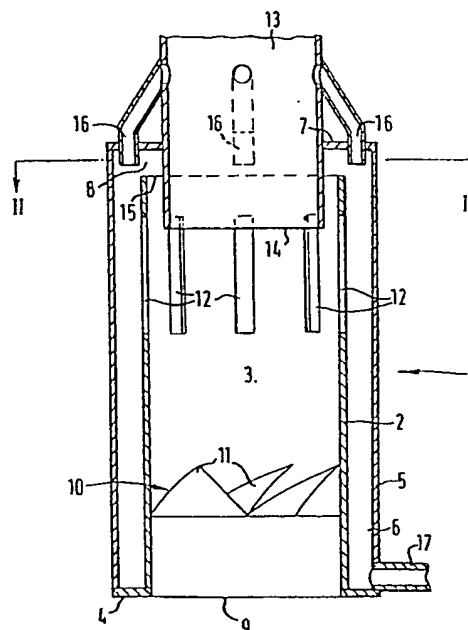


FIG. 1

EP 0 048 508 A2

APPARATUS FOR TREATING MIXTURES OF LIQUID AND GAS

The present invention relates to an apparatus for treating mixtures of liquid and gas, comprising a tubular wall defining an inner space and an outer space, inlet means for supplying a mixture of a liquid and gas into said inner space, swirl imparting means inside the inner space for imparting a rotary movement to the mixture of liquid and gas to separate the liquid and the gas, and outlet means for separately discharging the liquid and the gas from the inner space.

The term gas is taken throughout this specification also to include vapour.

Apparatuses of the above-mentioned type are suitable for use in columns for separating liquid/gas mixtures, as well as in columns for contacting liquids and gases for creating an exchange of matter and/or heat between the phases, followed by separating the phases. Thereto the apparatuses are mounted in or over openings in a tray arranged in a column.

When the above-mentioned apparatus is applied in columns for contacting liquids and gases, the apparatus is provided with a mixing chamber having separate liquid and gas inlet means. In said mixing chamber the liquid is atomized in the supplied gas stream so that matter and/or heat between the liquid and gas may be exchanged. The mixture of liquid and gas is supplied to swirl imparting means for subsequently separating the liquid from the gas stream.

Apparatuses of the above-mentioned type are widely used in the oil and chemical industry.

An example of such apparatuses is described in British patent specification 1,123,546. This known apparatus comprises a cylindrical wall enclosing an inner space. A vane assembly is

arranged within the inner space for separating liquid from a gas stream. The separated liquid may be discharged from the inner space partly through liquid discharge openings provided in the cylindrical wall and partly over the upper edge of said wall.

Another example of an apparatus for treating mixtures of liquid and gas is described in U.S. patent specification 4,015,960. This known apparatus comprises an inner space enclosed by a tube and provided with blades for imparting a rotary movement to a mixture of liquid and gas introduced into said inner space via the open lower end of the tube. The liquid, separated from the gas stream by the action of said blades, is subsequently discharged from the inner space via an opening in the wall of the tube. Said opening is arranged on approximately the same level as the blades. The remaining gas stream is discharged from the inner space via an outlet tube arranged co-axially with the main tube and having the lower end thereof arranged inside said main tube.

The above-mentioned known apparatuses have a satisfactory separating action at rather limited flow velocities of the mixtures to be treated and at rather low liquid loadings. Increase of the flow velocity and/or liquid loading will, however, cause a decrease of the separating action. This decrease is caused by the phenomenon of re-entrainment of liquid by the gas stream on leaving the inner space of the treating apparatus.

The object of the present invention is to provide an apparatus for treating mixtures of liquid and gas which apparatus has a higher efficiency, even at high flow velocities and/or high liquid loadings than the known apparatus.

According to the invention, the apparatus for treating mixtures of liquid and gas comprises a tubular wall defining an inner space and an outer space, a top wall arranged at some distance above the tubular wall and confining said inner space

and said outer space in upward direction, inlet means for supplying a mixture of a liquid and a gas into the inner space, swirl imparting means inside the inner space for imparting a rotary movement to the mixture to separate the liquid and the gas, outlet means for separately discharging the liquid and the gas from the inner space, said outlet means comprising (a) a primary gas outlet tube arranged co-axially with the inner space, passing through the top wall and having the lower end thereof positioned inside the inner space below the upper end of the tubular wall, and (b) at least one liquid discharge opening arranged in the tubular wall, the apparatus further comprising at least one secondary gas outlet tube for discharging gas from the outer space, said secondary gas outlet tube passing through the top wall and having the lower end thereof positioned inside the outer space.

The invention will now be described by way of example in more detail with reference to the embodiments thereof as shown in the drawings.

Figure 1 shows a vertical section of a first embodiment of the invention;

Figure 2 shows cross-section II-II of the apparatus shown in Figure 1;

Figure 3 shows a vertical section of a column provided with a second embodiment of the invention;

Figure 4 shows detail IV of Figure 3 on a larger scale;

Figure 5 is a top view of the apparatus shown in Figure 4;

Figure 6 shows a vertical section of a column tray provided with a third embodiment of the invention;

Figure 7 shows cross-section VII-VII of the column tray shown in Figure 6.

Although in the drawings certain specific liquid discharge means are shown in association with specific gas outlet means and these means are arranged in certain specific positions

relative to each other, it will be understood that these associations and positions are merely illustrative and that the various features may be applied individually to the several other embodiments.

5 Figures 1 and 2 show an apparatus according to the invention for treating mixtures of liquid and gas. This apparatus is also indicated hereinafter by the expression swirl tube.

10 The swirl tube 1 comprises a cylindrical wall 2 enclosing an inner or separating space 3. The cylindrical wall 2, being mounted on a bottom plate 4, is surrounded by an enveloping wall 5. Between the wall 2 and the enveloping wall 5 an outer or liquid discharge space 6 is present, which outer space is confined in downward direction by the bottom plate 4 and in upward direction by a top wall 7. Said top wall 7 is arranged
15 at some distance above the cylindrical wall 2, thereby creating a fluid passage 8 between the inner space 3 and the outer space 6. Through the opening 9 of the swirl tube 1 a gas/liquid mixture may be supplied to a vane assembly 10 consisting of a number of blades 11 and being arranged inside the inner space 3. The
20 cylindrical wall 2 is provided with a number of longitudinal liquid discharge openings 12, arranged around the periphery of said wall 2.

25 A primary gas outlet tube 13 passing through the top wall 7 has the lower end 14 thereof arranged below the upper end 15 of the wall 2 thereby extending into the separating space 3. The outlet tube 13, vane assembly 10 and separating space 3 are substantially co-axially arranged relative to each other.

30 A number of secondary gas outlet tubes 16 passing through the top wall 7 extend into the outer space 6. These secondary gas outlet tubes 16 form a fluid communication between the upper part of the outer space 6 and the interior of the primary gas outlet tube 13. Finally, the swirl tube 1 comprises an outlet tube 17 having one end thereof arranged in an opening in the lower part of the enveloping wall 5, for discharging liquid
35 from the outer space 6.

In operation, a mixture of liquid droplets and gas is introduced into the separating space 3 of the swirl tube 1 via the opening 9. In the separating space 3 the gas/liquid mixture passes through the vane assembly 10, which vane assembly imparts a rotary movement to the gas/liquid mixture. By the rotary movement the liquid droplets of the gas/liquid mixture are flung outwardly to impinge and coalesce on the inner surface of the cylindrical wall 2. The liquid layer thus formed on the inner surface of the wall 2 passes partly through the longitudinal liquid discharge openings 12 in the wall 2 and partly over the upper edge 15 of said wall 2. The separated liquid is collected in the lower part of the liquid discharge space 6 and is finally discharged from said space 6 via the outlet tube 17.

The major part of the gaseous components of the gas/liquid mixture having passed the vane assembly 10, is discharged from the separating space 3 via the primary gas outlet tube 13. In order to avoid that the liquid layer formed on the inner surface of the wall 2 by the action of the vane assembly 10 is entrained by the gas stream on leaving the separating space 3, the cross-sectional area of the gas outlet tube 13 is substantially smaller than the cross-sectional area of the separating space 3. A suitable cross-sectional area of the gas outlet tube 13 may be chosen within the range of 15 through 65 per cent of the cross-sectional area of the space 3. In this range of cross-sectional areas an effective separation of liquid from a gas stream can be obtained without an inadmissible increase of the pressure drop of the gas stream treated by the swirl tube 1.

The liquid separated from the gas stream and entering into the outer space 6 may contain small amounts of gas. This gas is discharged from said outer space 6 via the secondary gas outlet tubes 16. During the discharge of liquid from the separating space 3 over the upper end of the cylindrical wall 2, a liquid film will be formed on the top wall 7. By positioning the lower ends of the gas outlet tubes 16 below the top wall 7 entrainment

of said liquid film by the gas stream leaving the swirl tube 1 via the outlet tubes 16 is avoided.

To minimize entrainment of liquid collected on the inner surface of the wall 2, by the gas stream leaving the swirl tube 1 via the primary gas outlet tube 13, the lower end 14 of said outlet tube 13 is arranged below the upper end of the liquid discharge openings 12. This arrangement enables the liquid collected on the inner surface of the wall above the openings 12 to leave the inner space 3 along two discharge ways - viz. downwards through the openings 12 and upwards through the fluid passage 8 above the upper end 15 of the wall 2 - without flowing in downward direction and thereby passing the lower end 14 of the gas outlet tube 13 and consequently becoming subjected to the entrainment action of the gas stream.

Reference is now made to Figure 3 showing a column 20 wherein liquids are contacted with gases for the exchange of matter and/or heat between the phases as, for instance, for the separation of hydrocarbon mixtures by distillation or the absorption of a gas or a component from a mixture of gases with the aid of a liquid. The column 20, having a column wall 21, is provided with means for the supply into and the discharge from the interior of the column 20 of fluids. These means are formed by a gas inlet tube 22, a gas outlet tube 23, a liquid inlet tube 24 and a liquid outlet tube 25. A number of parallel trays 26 are arranged in the interior of the column 20, each of these trays being provided with a plurality of apparatuses 27 for treating the liquid and gas supplied into the column 20. These apparatuses 27, being mounted in openings 30 in the trays 26 will be discussed in more detail hereinafter with reference to the Figures 4 and 5. Parallel to each of the trays 26 two parallel walls 28 and 29 are arranged. Each wall 28 is provided with a plurality of openings 31 for the discharge of gas from a tray 26 in an upward direction. The space between each pair of walls 28 and 29 pertaining to a common, not lower-

most tray 26 is in fluid communication with the space between each pair of a next lower tray 26 and wall 29 by means of a tube 32.

As shown in Figure 4 each apparatus 27 comprises a mixing chamber 40 and an inner space that forms the separating chamber 41. Both chambers are enclosed by a cylindrical wall 42 and separated from each other by a vane assembly 44. The mixing chamber 40 is provided with a number of liquid supply openings 43 arranged in the lower part of the wall 42. A number of circular liquid discharge openings 45 are arranged in the upper part of the cylindrical wall 42. As shown in Figure 4 the wall 28 is arranged at some distance above the upper end 50 of the cylindrical wall 42, thereby creating a fluid passage 46 between the separating chamber 41 and an outer space (also called liquid discharge space) 47. The outer space 47 is confined in lateral direction by the column wall 21 shown in Figure 3. A number of conically shaped primary gas outlet tubes 48 communicate at their upper ends with the openings 31 in the wall 28. The lower end 49 of each primary gas outlet tube 48 is positioned inside a separating chamber 41 below the upper end 50 of a wall 42. The apparatuses 27 further comprise a number of common secondary gas outlet tubes 51, positioned in openings in the wall 28 (see also Figure 5).

The operation of the column 20 (see Figure 3) will now be described with reference to Figures 3 and 4. Via gas inlet tube 22 and liquid inlet tube 24 gas and liquid are supplied into the interior of the column 20. After a short timelag the interior of the column is filled with liquid and gas.

The gas and liquid simultaneously enter into each of the mixing chambers 40 on a tray 26 via openings 30 and 43, respectively. In each mixing chamber the liquid is subsequently atomized in the supplied gas stream, and a mixture of liquid drops and gas is formed allowing the exchange of matter and/or heat between the liquid and the gas. This mixture is sub-

sequently forced to pass the swirl imparting means 44, and a centrifugal force is imposed on the mixture. Due to this centrifugal force the liquid droplets are thrust outwardly and impinge and coalesce on the inner surface of the cylindrical wall 42 of each separating chamber 41. The major part of the gas stream is removed from the separating chambers 41 via the primary gas outlet tubes 48. The liquid separated from the gas stream and collected on the walls 42 is discharged from the separating chambers 41 partly via the openings 45 in the walls 42 and partly over the upper ends 50 of said walls 42.

The liquid discharged from the separating chambers 41 is subsequently collected on the wall 29 pertaining to a tray 26. The liquid on said wall 29 is forced to flow through the tubes 32 to a next lower tray 26. To this end the tubes 32 pass through a tray 26 and the walls 28 and 29 pertaining to a next lower tray 26. The liquid collected on said lower tray 26 is subsequently treated by apparatuses 27 on said lower tray 26, in the manner as described in the above. Once the liquid has reached the lowermost tray 26 in the column 20 and has been treated by the apparatuses 27 on said lowermost tray 26 the liquid is removed from the interior of the column 20 through the liquid outlet tube 25.

Gas entrained by the liquid on leaving the separating chambers 41, is discharged from the outer space 47 surrounding said chambers 41, through the intermediary of the secondary gas outlet tubes 51. The gas leaving the separating chambers 41 via the primary gas outlet tubes 48 and the gas leaving the outer space 47 via the secondary gas outlet tubes 51 flow in upward direction and will enter the apparatuses 27 on a next upper tray 26. Upon arrival at said next upper tray 26 the gas is first mixed with liquid and subsequently separated from said liquid in the same manner as discussed in the above. Once the gas has passed through the apparatuses 27 on the uppermost tray 26 in the column 20, the gas is removed from the interior of

the column 20 via the gas outlet tube 23.

Referring now to Figures 6 and 7, a column tray 60 provided with apparatuses 61 for separating gas/liquid mixtures is shown. The column tray 60 is arranged in a column for separating gas/
5 liquid mixtures. Part of the column wall, indicated by reference numeral 62, is shown in Figure 6. The column is provided with suitable, not shown, means for the supply of gas/liquid mixtures into the interior of the column and for the separate discharge of liquid and gas from the column. As shown in Figure 6, each
10 apparatus 61 comprises an inner space (also indicated as separating chamber) 63 being enclosed by a cylindrical wall 64. At some distance above the upper ends of said walls 64 a wall 65 is arranged parallel to the tray 60. Means 66 for imparting a rotary movement to gas/liquid mixtures in the inner space 63 are
15 schematically shown. Those parts of the walls 64, which are positioned downstream of said swirl imparting means 66 are provided with longitudinal tangential openings 67, formed by locally cutting and bending said walls 64. For the discharge of gas from the separating chambers 63 primary gas outlet tubes 68
20 are arranged in openings in the wall 65. The wall 65 is furthermore provided with secondary gas outlet tubes 69. These secondary gas outlet tubes 69 form a passage for gas collected in the outer space 70 surrounding the apparatuses 61. As shown in Figure 6 the outer space is confined in lateral direction by the column wall
25 62. For removing liquid from the outer space 70, a tube 71 is arranged in an opening of the tray 60.

In operation, a gas/liquid mixture supplied into the interior of the column having the column wall 62 flows upwardly and passes through the separating chambers 63 on the tray 60.
30 By the action of the swirl-imparting means 66 the liquid is separated from the gas stream and is forced to leave the separating chambers 63 partly through the openings 67 and partly over the upper ends of the cylindrical walls 64. In order to prevent that liquid discharged from a separating

chamber 63 will hamper the liquid discharge from an adjacent separating chamber 63, skirts 72 are arranged between adjacent chambers 63. The skirts 72 are secured to the wall 65 and have their lower ends arranged at least below the lower ends of the longitudinal openings 67 in the cylindrical walls 64. As shown
5 in Figure 7 the skirts may form an enveloping wall having a square shape in cross section.

The liquid discharged from the separating chambers 63 is collected in the outer space 70. Through the tube 71 the liquid
10 subsequently passes to the bottom part of the column, where the liquid is removed from the interior of the column by (not shown) liquid discharge means.

The major parts of the gas streams having passed the swirl-imparting means 66 flow in upward direction through the primary
15 gas outlet tubes 68. Gas, entrained by the liquid on leaving the separating chambers 63, will flow in upward direction through the secondary gas outlet tubes 69. The gas from the outlet tubes 68 and 69 is removed from the interior of the column by (not shown) gas discharge means arranged downstream of the wall 65.

20 It will be appreciated that instead of a single liquid discharge tube 71, a plurality of tubes may be applied for removing liquid from the outer space 70 towards the bottom part of the column.

The invention is not restricted to treating apparatuses
25 comprising cylindrically shaped walls 2, 42 and 64. Any type of tubular wall may advantageously be applied, such as rectangularly shaped tubular walls. Moreover, the cross-sectional area over the length of the tubular wall does not need to be constant.

30 Although according to Figures 3, 4 and 6 the tubular walls of the apparatuses are mounted in openings of a tray, said tubular walls may have a diameter smaller than the corresponding openings in the tray and be mounted over the said openings.

The present invention is not restricted to the particular type of swirl-imparting means as shown in Figures 1 and 3 and indicated with reference numbers 10 and 44, respectively. Instead thereof, a hub with blades may for example be applied.

5 Further, the invention is not restricted to tubular walls with liquid discharge openings of the types shown in the drawings. Instead thereof, the liquid discharge openings may for example be formed by cutting and stretching part of a tubular wall into a lattice.

10 It is remarked that the present invention is not restricted to apparatuses provided with enveloping walls having configurations as shown in the Figures 1, 2 and 6. For example, enveloping walls having a hexagonal configuration may also advantageously be applied.

15 It is noted that the total cross-sectional area of the secondary gas outlet tubes 16, 51, 69 of each apparatus preferably amounts to at least 6 per cent of the total cross-sectional area of the primary gas outlet tubes 13, 48 and 68, respectively. With respect to the gas outlet tubes 48 the cross-sectional area is interpreted as the minimum cross-sectional area.

20 Finally, the area of the fluid passages 8 and 46 is preferably at most 30 per cent of the area occupied by the liquid discharge openings 12 and 45, respectively.

C L A I M S

1. An apparatus for treating mixtures of liquid and gas comprising a tubular wall defining an inner space and an outer space, a top wall arranged at some distance above the tubular wall and confining said inner space and said outer space in
5 upward direction, inlet means for supplying a mixture of a liquid and a gas into the inner space, swirl imparting means inside the inner space for imparting a rotary movement to the mixture of the liquid and the gas to separate the liquid and the gas, outlet means for separately discharging the liquid
10 and the gas from the inner space, said outlet means comprising (a) a primary gas outlet tube, arranged co-axially with the inner space, passing through the top wall and having the lower end thereof positioned inside the inner space below the upper end of the tubular wall, (b) at least one liquid
15 discharge opening arranged in the tubular wall, the apparatus further comprising at least one secondary gas outlet tube for discharging gas from the outer space, said secondary gas outlet tube passing through the top wall and having the lower end thereof positioned inside the outer space.
- 20 2. Apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the lower end of the secondary gas outlet tube is arranged below the upper end of the tubular wall.
3. The apparatus as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the outer space is at least partly confined in lateral direction
25 by a skirt.
4. The apparatus as claimed in claim 3, wherein the skirt forms an enveloping wall which is connected to the top wall.
5. The apparatus as claimed in claim 4, wherein the lower end of the skirt is positioned below the lower end of the
30 liquid discharge opening.

6. The apparatus as claimed in any one of the claims 1-5, wherein the lower end of the primary gas outlet tube extends below the upper end of the liquid discharge opening(s).
7. The apparatus as claimed in any one of the claims 1-6, wherein the apparatus comprises a plurality of substantially
5 equally spaced secondary gas outlet tubes.
8. The apparatus as claimed in any one of the claims 1-7, wherein the cross-sectional area of the secondary gas outlet tube(s) is at least 6 per cent of the cross-sectional area of
10 the primary gas outlet tube.
9. The apparatus as claimed in any one of the claims 1-8, wherein the inlet means are in communication with a mixing chamber for preparing and supplying a mixture of a liquid and gas to the inlet means.
- 15 10. A tray for treating mixtures of liquid and gas provided with a number of apparatuses for treating mixtures of liquid and gas as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, each apparatus having a tubular wall being mounted in or over an opening in the tray.

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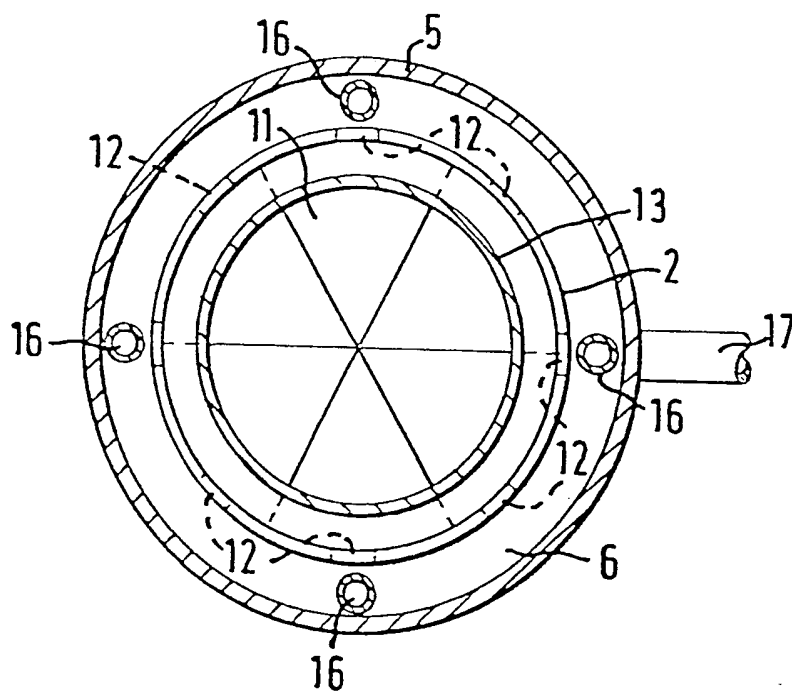


FIG. 2

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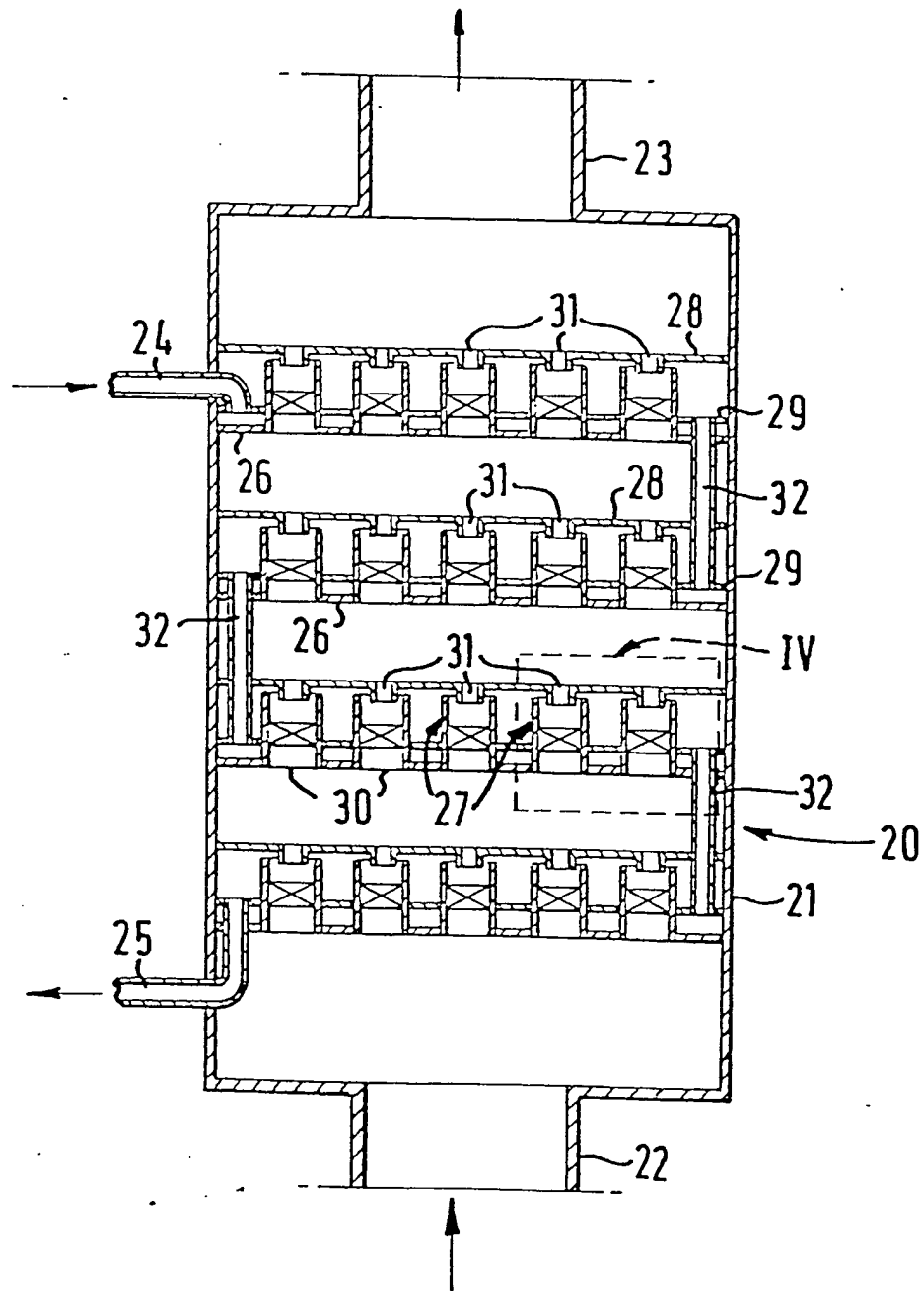
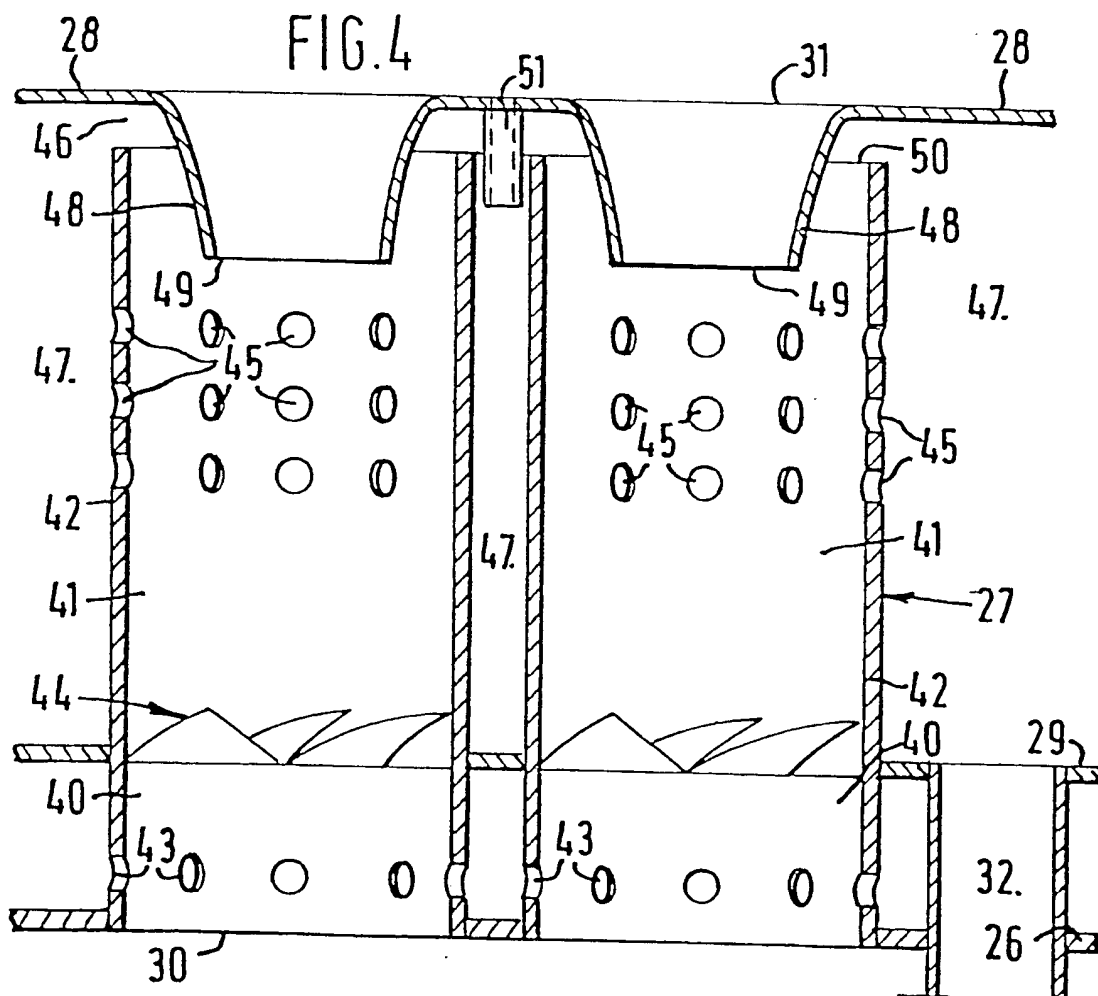
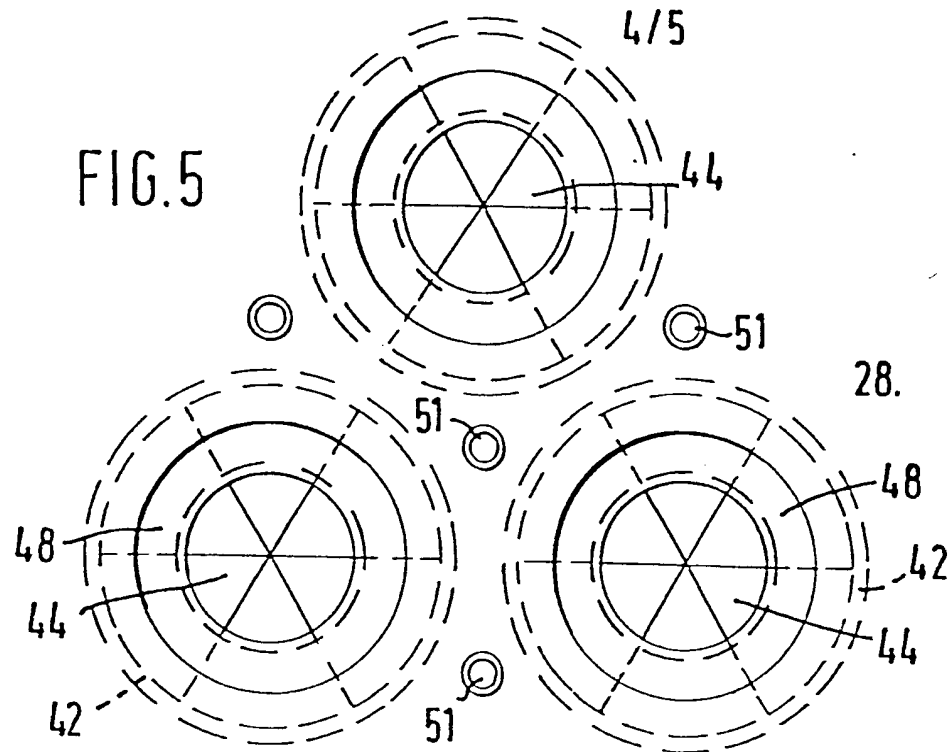


FIG. 3



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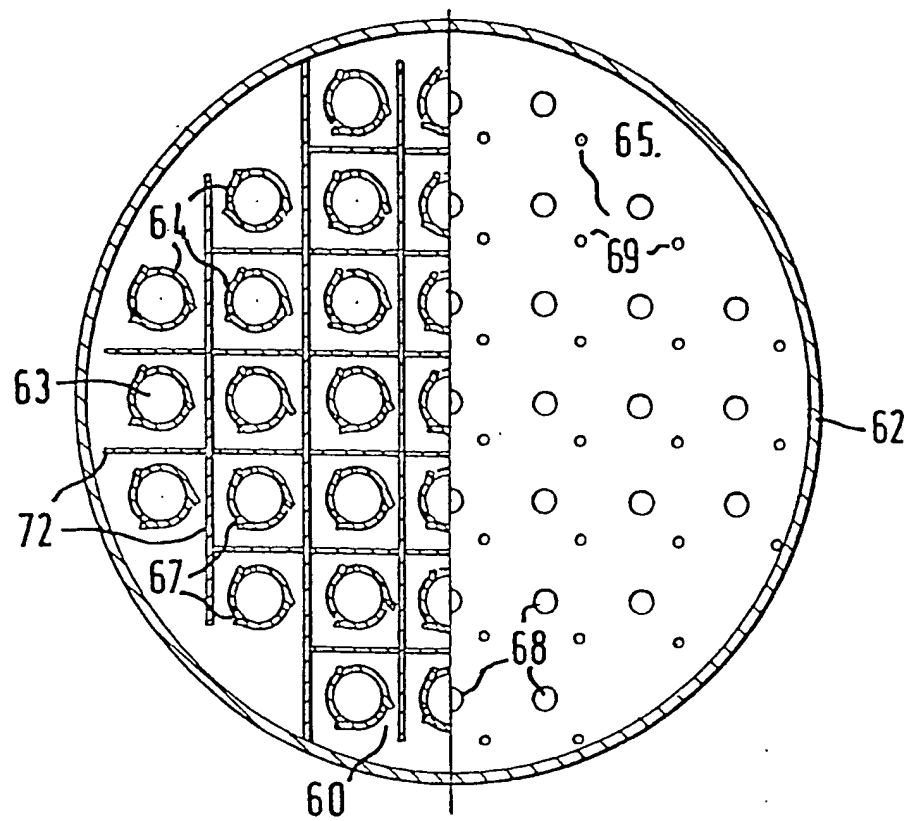


FIG. 7

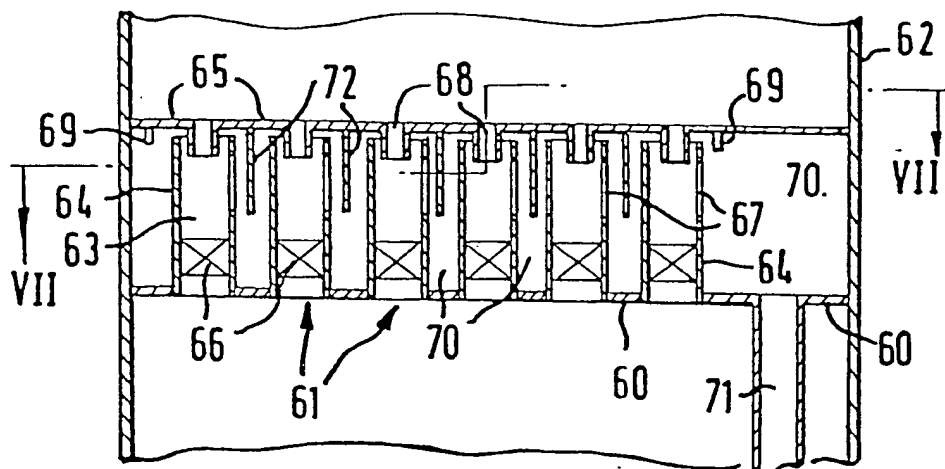


FIG. 6

